

February 13, 2020

SB 19 - An Act Concerning Sexual Misconduct on College Campuses

Lead Sponsor: Senator Will Haskell

Dear Senator Will Haskell, Representative Gregg Haddad, and honorable members of the Committee of Higher Education and Employment Advancement,

I am submitting this testimony in strong favor of all aspects of ***SB 19 - An Act Concerning Sexual Misconduct on College Campuses***. This bill would provide protections and create transparency around sexual assault on college campuses across the state. I grew up in Amherst, Massachusetts and currently attend Umass, Amherst as a fifth year senior. Although I am not a constituent of any Connecticut legislator, I write this as a survivor, as a student, as a representative of the Every Voice Coalition. Most importantly, I write this as a friend. Exactly one week ago, on Thursday, someone very dear to me, a student of a CT college, disclosed to me that they were sexually assaulted. For this student's privacy, I will not include any further details. I dedicate this testimony to her.

As students, we put our education, trust, dedication, and future into the hands of our chosen colleges, universities, and the states they reside in. When I opened my letter of acceptance I was excited and also relieved, I grew up around Umass so I knew my parents would be a phone call and a quick drive away if I needed anything. Not to mention their respective offices were within a one minute walk from my freshman dorm. I speak on behalf of students to express that when we post to our facebook the school we are dedicating our student careers to, we should not be dedicating ourselves to a life-sentence of trauma. Not every student will experience sexual assault but for those who do, the violation is life-altering. The truth is, as survivors, the very essence and passion that drove us to pursue a degree crumbles before us. After my own assault, I withdrew from five classes and received low marks in many others. I contemplated dropping out of college, moving away from a town I grew up in, and in my most desperate moments I contemplated taking my own life. I was the victim of sexual

assault, but what I survived was the aftermath. I wish I knew that the school I went to had a higher standard of safety, but my story is like so many others.

The first section of this bill holds institutions of higher education to a greater standard state wide. After I was raped I did not know what to do or who to turn to. I blamed myself for drinking beyond the point of memory retention, afraid that would be used against me. To my core, I believed that the assault that kept me from sleeping, broke my connection to safety in my own body, and disrupted my college career would not be seen as valid in the eyes of anyone I disclosed my assault to. The provisions in these bills include but are not limited to:

- Raising the bar of consent to affirmative consent,
- Ensuring that students understand being intoxicated will not be held against them and that affirmative consent cannot be given when incapacitated due to alcohol consumption.
- That having had a dating or romantic history with the perpetrator does not invalidate an alleged assault.

Although these three aspects of the bill pertain to me, the lack of these provisions encompasses a culture of rape that has not been addressed with the action that we seek today. From a student's perspective, having a policy written detailing the definition of rape will give a voice to victim's who feel their story will not be seen as valid in the eyes of the administration.

At the time of my assault reporting and pressing charges was not a part of my process, as each healing process is unique to every victim. Two weeks after my assault, I went to get tested at the Health Services on my campus to which I disclosed my assault to request a comprehensive STI screening. The health care provider I saw did not pay any mind to my disclosure of sexual assault, and did not offer me any resources regarding local advocacy, counseling, mental or other health care, as is mandated to be offered in this bill. What proceeded were the worst two years of my life to date. I am only twenty-three and I cannot imagine what my life would have been like if I had not experienced that violation and the aftermath. It was then that I began to believe that no adult would believe me, until I was contemplating suicide on the 6th floor of my dorm when I called my father, sat on my hands until he arrived did I break down and tell him

what happened. It's because of him, and not because of support from my school, am I alive today. Students in Connecticut, and frankly in every state should know their safety and rights are valued and put as a priority.

I dedicate this testimony to myself, because every time I stand up and demand more for the next generation of college students I get back a piece of myself that was taken from me, I regain my voice. I dedicate this testimony to my close friend who was raped one week ago today. I want her to go to school in a state that puts campus safety as a top priority. I dedicate this testimony to every student who believed their college experience would not include a violation of their basic human rights.

Sincerely,

Nora Gallo